

VZCZCXRO1725  
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DE RUEHSB #0530/01 1751426  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 231426Z JUN 08  
FM AMEMBASSY HARARE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3060  
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY  
RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 2075  
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 2195  
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0737  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1472  
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 1830  
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 2251  
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 4682  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000530

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR S. HILL  
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU  
ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS  
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR E. LOKEN AND L. DOBBINS  
STATE PASS TO NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/23/2018  
TAGS: PGOV PREL ASEC PHUM KDEM ZI  
SUBJECT: MDC PULLS OUT OF ELECTION

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Classified By: Ambassador James D. McGee for reason 1.4 (d)

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (C) A day after telling the Ambassador the MDC intended to participate in the June 27 runoff election, MDC president Morgan Tsvangirai on June 22 announced the MDC would boycott the election. Tsvangirai told the press and diplomats at a later briefing that continuing violence against the population, the violent suppression of his campaign, and government rigging made an election impossible. Tsvangirai told diplomats that the ultimate solution was not a new election, but a negotiated settlement resulting in a government of national unity, headed by himself, and the retirement of Zimbabwean president Mugabe. He said the MDC would announce future plans on June 25.

¶2. (C) Tsvangirai told the Ambassador on June 21 that he had met with South African president Thabo Mbeki on June 19 at Mbeki's request and had pressed the idea of a transitional government rather than an election. He told Mbeki that he (Mbeki) lacked sufficient strength as a sole mediator, and that Mbeki should be part of a SADC mediation team. Mbeki promised to pursue this suggestion. END SUMMARY.

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Ambassador's Meeting with Tsvangirai  
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¶3. (C) Tsvangirai told the Ambassador that (despite conflicting news reports) the MDC would contest the June 27 runoff election. Tsvangirai said that, after consulting with MDC members, he felt he could not quit after having come so far.

¶4. (C) Tsvangirai said he had met Mbeki two days earlier at Mbeki's request. Mbeki, according to Tsvangirai, said he was

aware of the violence and appreciated the problems. But he had been unable to achieve a breakthrough in the impasse between ZANU-PF and the MDC, and he had no plan to go forward.

15. (C) Tsvangirai suggested Mbeki ask Mugabe (whom Mbeki was scheduled to see later in the day) what his plans were since it was obvious that nobody, including the international community, would accept a Mugabe victory in the June 27 election. Tsvangirai told Mbeki the goal should be a transitional government on the following terms:

--Retirement of Mugabe;  
--Government to be led by Tsvangirai in accordance with the March 29 election;  
--Transitional government to discuss new constitution and new elections.

16. (C) Tsvangirai said he had learned that Mbeki had presented the transitional plan to Mugabe. Additionally, Tsvangirai told Mbeki that he was no match for Mugabe as a sole negotiator on behalf of SADC; he needed to enlarge the mediation team with other SADC leaders. Mbeki agreed to do so.

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Decision to Withdraw  
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17. (C) The MDC at press and diplomatic briefings on June 22 distributed a written statement (scanned to AF/S) outlining its decision to not participate in the June 27 runoff election. Summarizing the written statement, Tsvangirai said the decision had been made unanimously by the MDC's Executive

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Committee and National Council and was based on:

--Continuing state-sponsored violence;  
--Suppression of the MDC campaign, including banning of all rallies, decimation of MDC structures and the arrests of MDC leaders and 2,000 polling agents; and  
--ZANU-PF vote-rigging activities.

18. (C) Stressing the importance of polling agents, Tsvangirai said the MDC would not be able to deploy 75 percent of its agents, and those agents who were deployed would not have access to rural areas.

19. (C) Tsvangirai emphasized the decision had not been made lightly. He noted that the day before (after the meeting with the Ambassador), he had attempted to campaign in Harare's high-density suburbs. People were afraid to talk to the MDC, and the fear on their faces was palpable. Earlier in the day, before the decision was made, the MDC had attempted to hold a rally in a stadium in Harare in an area of strong MDC support. ZANU-PF youth had taken over the stadium and had used force on MDC supporters who tried to enter. The MDC's Youth Chairman had attempted to go to the rally and was now in the hospital. Tsvangirai concluded that the election had become a declaration of war against the people and the MDC would not be part of it. The people wanted to support the MDC, but the mood and the people's willingness to participate in an election had changed dramatically in the last two days.

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Solution to the Crisis  
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10. (C) Tsvangirai at the briefing said a solution to the current crisis lay not with another election but with a negotiated settlement that involved a form of "cohabitation." This was necessary because ZANU-PF possessed the institutions of state, while the MDC enjoyed popular support. His proposal, presented to diplomats, was similar to that related to Mbeki on June 19.

--End to violence;  
--Mugabe's retirement;  
--Tsvangirai, a winner of March 29 election, to lead government;  
--After transitional government has settled in, n election supervised by SADC and international community;  
--Economic reform.

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Nex Steps  
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¶11. (C) Tsvangirai said tht the MDC would consult internally and then make an announcement on June 25 on next steps. He impied this would involve a new diplomatic offensive in an effort to seek pressure on the Mugabe regime from the UN, AU, and SADC. Tsvangirai said that in the last few days he had been in contact, in addition to Mbeki, with Zambia's Mwanawasa, Botswana's Khama, and Tanzania's Kikwete.

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The Residue of the Election  
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¶12. (C) ZANU-PF justice minister Patrick Chinamasa told the media that the election would go forward unless the MDC submitted a written notice of withdrawal. The MDC told us it is planning to submit a letter stating it is impossible to participate in an election under these circumstances.

(COMMENT: The Electoral Act states that a presidential

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candidate must withdraw his candidacy at least 21 days before an election. There is no discussion in the Act of a runoff election. We believe ZANU-PF is disappointed with the MDC withdrawal, as it hoped to derive some legitimacy from an electoral win. It remains to be seen if the GOZ will treat an MDC letter as a formal withdrawal and will call off the election, or whether it will decide to proceed. END COMMENT.)

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COMMENT  
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¶13. (C) ZANU-PF has dug in its heels, as manifested by Mugabe's statements at rallies and to the media that the party would never cede power to the MDC. We see no willingness at this point of ZANU-PF and Mugabe to negotiate a transitional government on the lines proposed by Tsvangirai. ZANU-PF has succeeded with its campaign of terror and will negotiate only on its terms.

¶14. (C) Tsvangirai clearly enjoys the support of the majority of the Zimbabwean people, and until recently the MDC thought it could win the election despite ZANU-PF's violence and machination. The MDC realized in the last several days, however, the pervasiveness and effectiveness of the ZANU-PF terror machine. While the MDC's withdrawal is disappointing, it is also understandable. And an election is not necessary to demonstrate to the world the unfairness of the electoral process which has been underpinned by terror. UN envoy Haile Menkerios saw it and the SADC observers continue to see it. Mbeki has been thoroughly briefed by his team of retired generals who have traveled the length and breath of the country. It is imperative that Mbeki, the UN, and SADC speak out. END COMMENT.

McGee